

EVIDENCE FOR DATING THE DESOLATION

The year 606 BC was the first year of the 70 years of desolation upon Jerusalem of which Pastor Russell affirms in *Studies in the Scriptures*, volume 2, chapter 4, pages 78-90. As the Hebrew calendar year began in the Autumn, it began 3 months prior to the Gregorian calendar counting of years beginning in January. This places the point of Jerusalem's destruction as 606¼ BC. This would be the Autumn of 607 (Gregorian) as noted by Edgar in *GPPII:130*, 225. The first full year of the desolation being 606 is sometimes designated as 607/606 BC. See the [70 year accounting](#) below.

This is contested by some conventional historians that it should be 587 BC being 20 years later and that Jerusalem lay desolate for only 50 years until the Cyrus decree. As with many historical and archaeology studies, such premises are initially proposed with questionable evidence, but later affirmed by subsequent writers without careful scrutiny of the premise. This leads to a general historical consensus which few persons ever re-examine the validity of the source.

Among those who have taken up the challenge is Rolf J. Furuli, Magister Artium, First Councillor in Semitic Languages, University of Oslo Norway. His detailed studies are found in his two books. Vol. I: *Persian Chronology and the Length of the Babylonian Exile of the Jews* (2012) and Vol. II: *Assyrian, Babylonian, and Egyptian Chronology* (2013). These are largely contested by conventional historians and authors. The major difference is that Furuli approaches the dating by first accepting the Bible is correct, then examining secular history and ancient tablets with an expertise in ancient languages and cuneiform script.

One major Babylonian clay tablet in evidence is inscribed on both sides and designated as VAT 4956. This notes the 37th year of Nebuchadnezzar in conjunction with certain astronomical positions of planets and the moon. The following Furuli text is part of a long dialogue in 2009:

We may start with the exile in Babylon. Daniel and the Chronicler say that Jerusalem was a desolate waste for a full 70 years, but this does not fit the Neo-Babylonian chronology. We should keep in mind that this chronology was fixed long before a single cuneiform tablet was unearthed - on the basis of the belief that the king list of the 2nd century astronomer Claudius Ptolemy was correct.

In 1915 two German scholars (Neugebauer/Weidner) published an analysis of the astronomical Diary VAT 4956, which has more than 30 positions of the moon and some planets in relation to particular stars. The tablet mentions year 37 of Nebuchadnezzar. This analysis showed that most of the positions fitted the year 568/67, and that was year 37 of Nebuchadnezzar II according to the chronology of Ptolemy.

Before this, in 1892, another German scholar (Strassmaier) published the tablet Strm Kambys 400, which also has many astronomical positions, and which mentions year 7 of Cambyses, which according to Ptolemy would be 523/22. Comparing these two tablets with the Bible indicates that at least one of the three sources give wrong information. The tablets allow for only about 50 years for the exile, while the Bible has 70. The usual way to proceed has been, 1) either to reject the witness of the Bible, or 2) to try to reinterpret the texts of the Bible.

I approached the issue from a different angle. I made a careful analysis of the passages in the Bible, and found that they, linguistically speaking, were perfectly clear, and no one would have tried to give them an alternative interpretation if the person did not have a particular agenda. Then I started to look at the Babylonian evidence with fresh eyes. The very backbone of the Neo-Babylonian chronology is VAT 4956. Interestingly no one has published a new analysis of it since 1915 (Sachs/Hunger published an English translation and transliteration in 1988, but no analysis). I made digital photographs of this tablet in Berlin, and analyzed it sign for sign (about 600) from a philological, linguistic and astronomical point of view (87 pages with this analysis is found in one of my books). My conclusion is that the positions of the moon better fit the year 588/87 than 568/67, and that would fit the 70-year chronology.

I have also visited the British Museum and read dated business tablets. And the dates of about 90 such tablets argues in favor of the view that the Neo-Babylonian Empire lasted longer than most scholars today believe. In one chapter I also discuss twelve persons that may have been kings in the Neo-Babylonian Empire, but are not mentioned by Ptolemy (the evidence for this is by no means conclusive, but should be considered). My conclusion, therefore, is that the cuneiform evidence does not definitely contradict a 70-year exile when Jerusalem was a desolate waste. But it is possible to interpret it in a way that conforms with Daniel and the Chronicler.

Then to Assyria. As a matter of fact, the royal inscriptions of Assyria exaggerates the victories of the kings and by and large are propaganda. The books of kings on the other hand have a completely different quality. The kings of Judah down to Sidkia can be followed, and their years of reign are mentioned. The chronology of Judah is between 30 and 40 years longer than the chronology of Assyria, and the two chronologies cannot be conformed. And as usual when sources differ, the Bible is the looser; the Assyrian chronology is accepted and the Biblical chronology is rejected. When I made a thorough study of the situation, I found something that even makes the situation ridiculous and laughable: The Assyrian chronology hinges on the interpretation of one single datum! Only astronomical information connected with a particular year of a particular king or official can be used to make an absolute chronology. Only once is such information available for Assyria; a solar eclipse is reported in the limmu (his one year as official) of Bur Sagale. This is viewed to be the solar eclipse of 15 June 763 B.C.E. However, there are at least 8 other solar eclipses that can fit the data. So, the Neo-Assyrian chronology has a very weak foundation, but most people are not aware of that.

This was a sketch, and there are hundreds of other interesting details that can be used to question the traditional chronology.

Best regards,
Rolf Furuli
University of Oslo

Archaeologists misrepresent a reading of the VAT 4956 tablet regarding the moon's position on Nisan 8, whereas the moon's position on Nisan 9 is the actual date inscribed. Proponents of the year 587 for the fall of Jerusalem contend it was a scribal error and so support their historical bias. Contending that Nisan 8 points to the year 568 for the 37th year of Nebuchadnezzar, avoids their rewriting of traditional chronology and accepted history. They attempt to force harmony to the secular record with the fiction of Nisan 8 to arrive at the contrived 587 date for the destruction of Jerusalem. This is nothing short of misrepresenting the record. This is the hazard of building historical consensus with non-Biblical sources.

The difference in the cuneiform marks for the numbers 8 or 9 is crucial in identifying the 37th year of Nebuchadnezzar which extends earlier to his 18th year for the siege on Jerusalem. Here the correct mark for Nisan 9 only supports the year 588 for Nebuchadnezzar's 37th year.

There are 13 sets of lunar positions on the VAT 4956 tablet. Only **some**, but **not all** of these lunar positions are claimed to match the year 568 BC. Yet **all 13 sets do match** calculated positions for 20 years earlier at 588 BC for the 37th year of Nebuchadnezzar. Consequently, his 18th year then indicates the fall of Jerusalem in 607 BC as the beginning of the Biblical 70 years for the desolation of Jerusalem until Cyrus.

These details were examined in two Watchtower magazine articles of October-November 2011. We do not affirm some other positions taken by this magazine and organization. However these articles were very well documented. We here extract only 3 pages from the subject. Examine them carefully.

charts included predictions made shortly before the recorded events, acknowledges that it is conceivable that some of these were “retrocalculations undertaken by scribes in the 4th and later centuries BC.”¹⁴ If these are retrocalculations, could they really be considered absolutely reliable unless corroborated by other evidence?

Even if an eclipse did occur on a certain date, does this mean that the *historical* information the writer of the tablet assigns to that date is accurate? Not necessarily. Scholar R. J. van der Spek explains: “The compilers were astrologers, not historians.” He describes sections of the tablets that contain historical records as “more or less casual,” and he warns that such historical information must “be used with caution.”¹⁵

What do the documents show? Consider the example of VAT 4956. The opening line of this tablet reads: “Year 37 of Nebukadnezzar, king of Babylon.”¹⁶ Thereafter, it contains detailed descriptions of the position of the moon and planets in relation to different stars and constellations. Also included is one lunar eclipse. Scholars say that all these positions occurred in 568/567 B.C.E., which would make the 18th year of Nebuchadnezzar II, when he destroyed Jerusalem, 587 B.C.E. But do these astronomical ref-

erences irrefutably point *only* to the year 568/567 B.C.E.?

The tablet mentions a lunar eclipse that was calculated as occurring on the 15th day of the third Babylonian month, Simanu. It is a fact that a lunar eclipse occurred on July 4 (Julian calendar) of this month during 568 B.C.E. However, there was also an eclipse *20 years earlier*, on July 15, 588 B.C.E.¹⁷

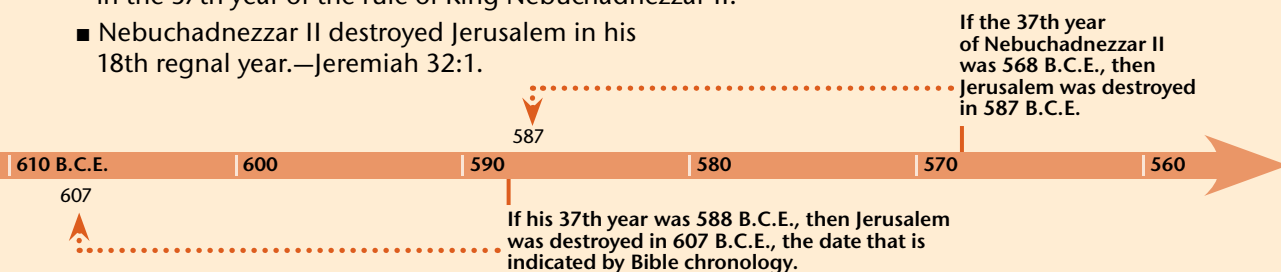
If 588 B.C.E. marked the 37th year of Nebuchadnezzar II, then his 18th year would be 607 B.C.E.—the very year indicated by the Bible’s chronology for the destruction of Jerusalem! (See the time line below.) But does VAT 4956 provide further corroborating evidence for the year 607 B.C.E.?

In addition to the aforementioned eclipse, there are 13 sets of lunar observations on the tablet and 15 planetary observations. These describe the position of the moon or planets in relation to certain stars or constellations.¹⁸ There are also eight time intervals between the risings and settings of the sun and the moon.^{18a}

Because of the superior reliability of the lunar positions, researchers have carefully analyzed these 13 sets of lunar positions on VAT 4956. They analyzed the data with the aid of a computer program capable of showing the location of celestial bodies on a

VAT 4956 POINTS TO WHICH YEAR FOR JERUSALEM’S DESTRUCTION —587 B.C.E. OR 607 B.C.E.?

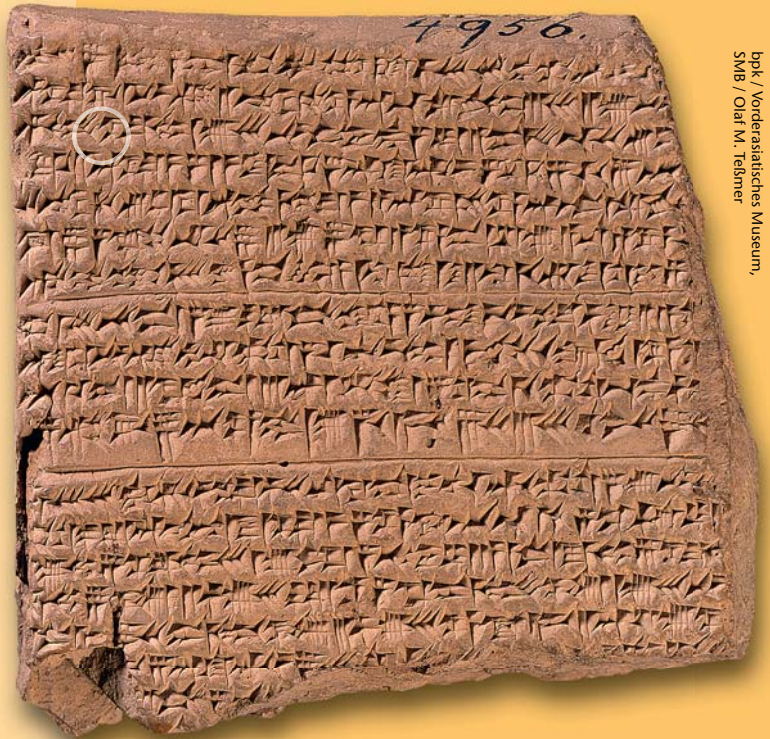
- The tablet describes astronomical events that occurred in the 37th year of the rule of King Nebuchadnezzar II.
- Nebuchadnezzar II destroyed Jerusalem in his 18th regnal year.—Jeremiah 32:1.



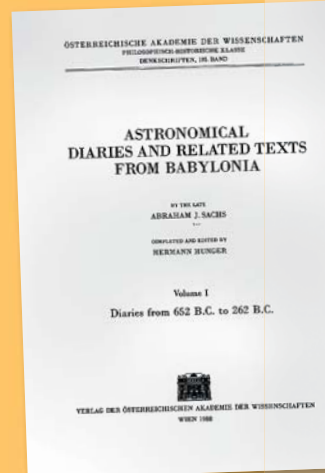
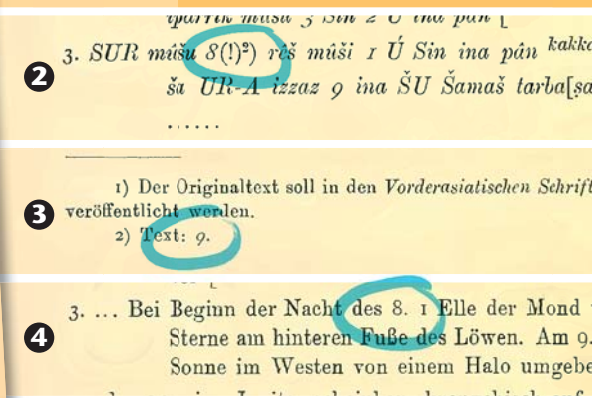
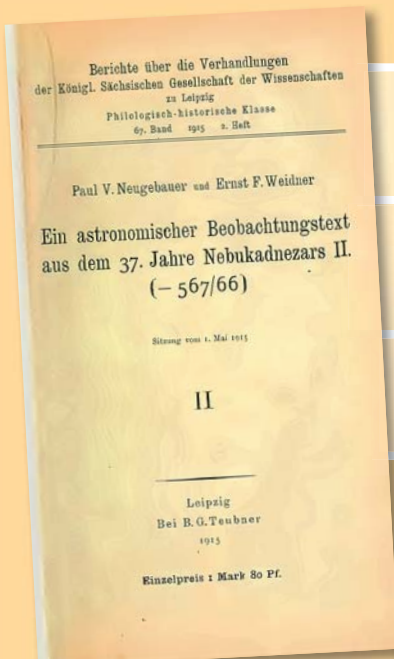
- VAT 4956 points more convincingly to 607 B.C.E.

WHAT DOES VAT 4956 REALLY SAY?

Why an issue? The third line on this tablet reads that on the “night of the 9th” during the first month (Nisanu/Nisan), the “moon stood 1 cubit in front of β Virginis.” However, Neugebauer and Weidner wrote in 1915 regarding the year 568 B.C.E. (which would point to 587 B.C.E. for Jerusalem’s destruction) that “the moon stood 1 cubit before this star on 8 Nisan, and *not on 9 Nisan.*” (Italics ours.) However, there was an exact match of the moon’s position for 588 B.C.E. on Nisan 9, which points to the date 607 B.C.E.



bpk / Vorderasiatisches Museum,
SMB / Olaf M. Telmer



Should it be the 9th day or the 8th day?

- (1) As shown in the accompanying photograph, the Akkadian symbol for the number 9 is clearly seen.
- (2) In their transliteration of this cuneiform text, Neugebauer and Weidner changed the "9" to an "8."
- (3) Only the footnote indicates that there was a "9" in the original text.
- (4) Even in their German translation, they put "8."
- (5) In 1988, Sachs and Hunger published the text as it actually reads, with a "9."
- (6) Yet, they preserve the alteration in their English translation, calling the "9th" an "error for: 8th."

VAT 4956

Copy: E.F. Weidner, AfO 16 Tf. XVII

Photo: Pl. 1 and 3

Transcription, translation, and commentary: P.V. Neugebauer and E.F. Weidner, *Texte aus dem 37. Jahre Nebukadnezars II. (-567/66) (= der Wiss., Phil.-hist. Kl. Bd. 67/2, 1915).*

Obv.:

1 MU-37 ^{1d}AG-NIG-DU-ŠEŠ LUGAL TIN-TIR^{ki}
[...]

2 ^dSAG-UŠ *ina* IGI SIM 2 *ina* Še-rì TIR-AN *ina*
[...]

5 3 ŠUR GE₆ 9 SAG GE₆ 1 KÜŠ *sin ina* IGI ^{mul}-GÌ
TÜR [... 11]

6 3 in the west. Night of the 3rd, the moon was 2
it rained'. Night of the 9th (error for: 8th), begi
1 cubit in front of β Virginis. The 9th, the sun in
[... The 11th]

4 or 19th. Jupiter's astronomical rising. On the 14th

certain date in the past.¹⁹ What did their analysis reveal? While not all of these sets of lunar positions match the year 568/567 B.C.E., *all 13 sets* match calculated positions for 20 years earlier, for the year 588/587 B.C.E.

One of the places where the lunar observations fit 588 B.C.E. even better than 568 B.C.E. is shown in the tablet reproduced on these pages. On line 3 of that tablet, we read that the moon was in a certain position on the "night of the 9th [of Nisanu]." However, the scholars who first dated the event to 568 B.C.E. (astronomical -567) acknowledged that in 568 B.C.E., the moon was in that position on "the 8th of Nisanu and not on the 9th." To support dating the tablet to 568 B.C.E., they postulated that the scribe erroneously wrote "9" instead of "8."²⁰ But the lunar position in line 3 finds an *exact match* on Nisanu 9 of 588 B.C.E.²¹

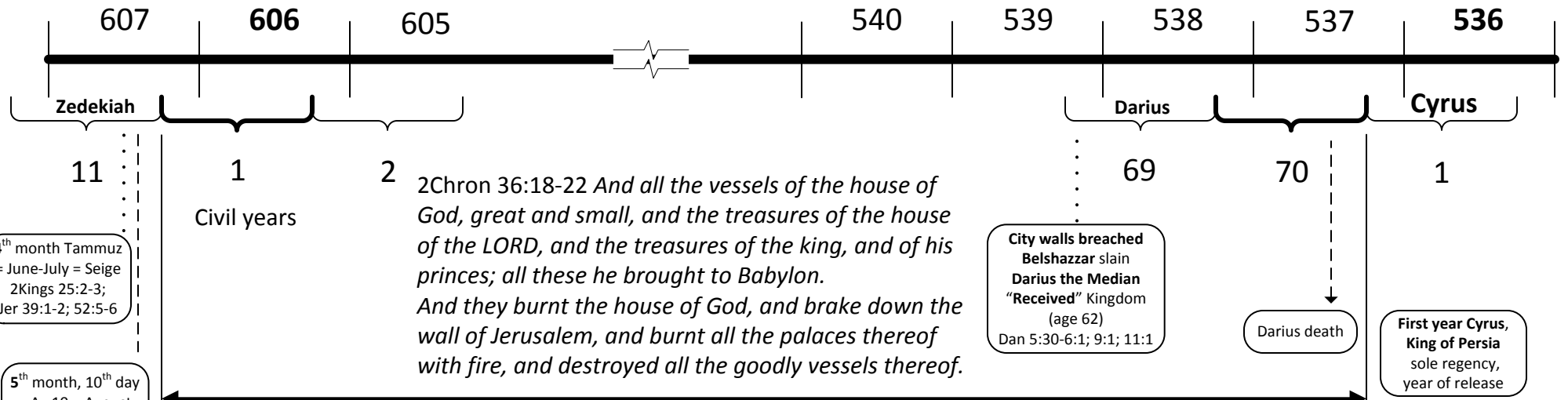
Clearly, much of the astronomical data in VAT 4956 fits the year 588 B.C.E. as the 37th year of Nebuchadnezzar II. This, therefore, supports the date of 607 B.C.E. for Jerusalem's destruction—just as the Bible indicates.

Why Trust the Bible?

At present, the majority of secular historians believe that Jerusalem was destroyed in 587 B.C.E. However, the Bible writers Jeremiah and Daniel clearly state that the Jews were in exile for 70 years, not 50 years. (Jeremiah 25:1, 2, 11; 29:10; Daniel 9:2) Those statements strongly indicate that Jerusalem was destroyed in 607 B.C.E. As the above evidence shows, that conclusion has some secular support.

Secular experts have repeatedly questioned the Bible's accuracy. Yet, when more evidence is uncovered, the Bible record has time and again been vindicated.* Those who trust the Bible have good reason to do so. They base their opinion on proof that the Bible is historically, scientifically, and prophetically accurate. That evidence leads them to believe the Bible's claim that it is the inspired Word of God. (2 Timothy 3:16) Why not investigate the evidence for yourself? You may well come to the same conclusion.

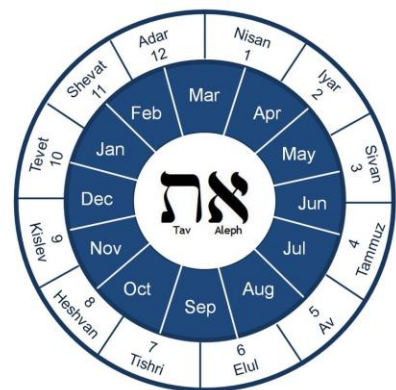
* For specific examples, see chapters 4 and 5 of the book *The Bible—God's Word or Man's?* published by Jehovah's Witnesses.



5th month, 10th day
= Av 10 = August
Temple burned
Jer 52:12-13

7th month = Tishri = October
"residue"/remnant removed for 70 years
(Jer 29:1-4)
2Kings 25:25-26
Jer 41:1; 44:2,3,7,22
"This day they are a desolation"

**Ezekiel
21:25-27**



And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons **until the reign of the kingdom of Persia:**
To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years.
Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished . . . he made a proclamation through all his kingdom . . .

Dan 9:2
"In the first year of his (Darius) reign I Daniel understood by the books the number of the years, whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the Prophet, that he would accomplish 70 years in the desolations of Jerusalem."

Cyrus' release decree
Ezra 1:1
Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing.